



GENDER & DEMOCRACY

Lexicon

January 2024





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01 Introduction

This lexicon is a comprehensive resource that categorizes and defines key terms and concepts prevalent in the fields of Indian politics, governance and feminism. It encompasses sections on democracy and significant social terms, national political terminologies and positions, state-level governance jargon and roles, local administrative terms and roles, as well as sections dedicated to feminism and gender-related concepts. This lexicon serves as a guide for a foundational understanding of the intricate language and terminologies that shape political and social discourse.



Note: This is not an exhaustive list and is a working document, and we will continue to update it every couple of years.



02 Important democratic & social terms

1. Alliance: A formal or informal agreement between two or more political parties to cooperate in an election or on specific issues.
2. Autocracy: A system of government where one person holds absolute power, typically without legal or democratic constraints. The ruler's decisions are not subject to external legal or electoral challenges.
3. Bicameralism: A system of government in which the legislature is divided into two houses or chambers, typically the lower house (Lok Sabha) and the upper house (Rajya Sabha).
4. Campaigning: Activities undertaken by political candidates and parties to promote their ideas, gain public support, and secure votes.
5. Casteless Society: A term describing a society without the traditional Hindu caste system, not discriminating any individuals based on identity.
6. Citizenship: The status of being a member of a particular country, with associated rights and responsibilities.
7. Coalition: A group of political parties coming together to form a government.
8. Communalism: The promotion of the interests of a particular religious or ethnic community, often at the expense of other communities.
9. Confederation: A loose association of independent states or organizations that agree to cooperate on specific issues or objectives.
10. Constituency (Parliamentary): For the purpose of constituting the Lok Sabha, the whole country has been divided into 543 Parliamentary Constituencies, each one of which elects one member. The members of the Lok Sabha are elected directly by the eligible voters. A specific geographic area is represented by an elected official, such as an MP. For example, Karnataka has 28 Lok Sabha (parliamentary) seats or constituencies, each of which is administered by a Member of Parliament. Tejasvi Surya, a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, represents the Bengaluru South constituency as an MP.

11. **Constituency (Legislative):** A legislative constituency is a distinct geographic area within a state or union territory represented by an elected member in the state's legislative assembly (MLA). These constituencies are defined based on population and geographical boundaries, ensuring local representation in the state's legislative processes. Each constituency elects one MLA through direct voting by eligible voters. For example, Delhi has 70 legislative assembly constituencies, each electing one MLA to represent its local area in the state's governance. Aishwini, a member of the Aam Aadmi Party, represents the Kalkaji constituency in New Delhi as an MLA.

12. **Constitution:** A set of fundamental principles or established precedents guiding a country's governance.

13. **Civic Engagement:** Participation in activities that contribute to the well-being of a community or society, including voting, volunteering and community organizing.

14. **Democracy:** A government system where power is vested in the people, who either govern directly or elect representatives.

15. **Democratic Socialism:** A political ideology combining democratic principles with socialism, emphasizing social justice and economic equality.

16. **Demographics:** The statistical characteristics of a population, such as age, gender, race and income.

17. **Dictatorship:** A government controlled by a single leader, known as a dictator, who has complete power over the state. Dictatorships are often characterized by authoritarian rule and lack of democratic freedoms.

18. **Dravidian:** A significant linguistic and cultural group in Southern Asia, primarily speaking languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

19. **Election:** The process of choosing representatives or leaders through voting.

20. **Election Day:** The day on which voting takes place in an election.



21. **Election Manifesto:** An Election Manifesto is a published document containing a declaration of the ideology, intentions, views, policies and programmes of a political party or a candidate. The Election Manifestos are drafted keeping an eye on forthcoming elections. These are published and well publicized.
22. **Election Symbol:** A graphical representation/logo assigned to a political party or candidate by the Election Commission of India.
23. **Electioneering:** The activities of parties and candidates to persuade voters to support them in an election.
24. **Electoral College:** A body of electors responsible for electing India's President and Vice President.
25. **Electoral Reforms:** Changes to improve the fairness, transparency and efficiency of elections.
26. **Electoral Roll:** The list of eligible voters in a constituency, compiled by the Election Commission of India.
27. **Electoral Voting Machine (EVM):** A machine that uses electronic technology to record and count votes.
28. **Emergency:** A state of exception where normal constitutional processes are suspended, often in times of crisis or threat.
29. **Federation:** A group of states with a central government but independence in internal affairs.
30. **Federalism:** The distribution of power between the central government and the states in a federation.
31. **First Past the Post System:** An electoral system where the candidate with the most votes wins the election.



32. **Foreign Policy**: The policies and actions of a country in its relations with other countries.

33. **Fundamental Rights**: The basic rights and freedoms guaranteed to all Indian citizens by the Constitution.

34. **Judicial Activism**: Judges interpreting laws and the Constitution to advance social justice and address societal issues.

35. **Judiciary**: The system of courts interpreting and applying the law to ensure justice.

36. **Left-wing**: Left-wing politics generally advocates for systemic change to prioritise social and economic equality, freedom, and rights, and a more involved role of the government in societal issues.

37. **Lobbying**: The act of attempting to influence government decisions, often through advocacy groups.

38. **Monarchy**: A form of government with a monarch (like a king, queen, or emperor) at the head. Monarchies can be absolute, where the monarch has complete power, or constitutional, where their powers are limited by law or a governing body.

39. **Oligarchy**: A government ruled by a small group of people, often from the same social, economic, or political class. Power is based on wealth, family ties, corporate connections, or military control.

40. **Other Backward Classes (OBC)**: Socially and educationally disadvantaged groups outside the Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories.

41. **Parliamentary System**: A democratic form of government where the executive branch derives its legitimacy from, and is accountable to, the legislature (parliament); the executive and legislative branches are thus interconnected.

42. **Police Brutality**: Excessive use of force by law enforcement officers, leading to harm or civil rights violations.

43. **Political Party**: An organized group with similar political aims, often contesting elections to implement their agenda.

44. **Republic**: A form of government where the affairs of a country are considered a "public matter" (res publica), and the head of state is an elected or nominated president, not a monarch. Republics often have elected representatives and an elected leader.



45. **Reservation**: Policies allocating a certain percentage of opportunities for historically underprivileged or marginalized communities.

46. **Right to Information (RTI)**: Legislation allowing citizens to request information from public authorities.

47. **Right-wing**: Right-wing politics tends to prioritize tradition, national sovereignty, and economic freedom, with a focus on individual responsibility and minimal government oversight in personal and economic matters.

48. **Scheduled Castes (SC)**: Historically disadvantaged communities based on the caste system.

49. **Scheduled Tribes (ST)**: Indigenous or tribal communities facing historical social and economic marginalization.

50. **Secularism**: The principle of separating religion from state affairs.

51. **Theocracy**: A form of government where priests or religious leaders govern in the name of a deity or based on religious laws. The laws of the state are typically based on religious laws.

52. **Totalitarianism**: An extreme form of authoritarian government where the state seeks to control every aspect of public and private life, often through coercive means.

53. **Vote Bank**: A group of voters consistently supporting a particular political party.

54. **Ward**: A ward is a local authority area, typically used for electoral purposes, within a city or municipality, representing a specific community or neighbourhood. To illustrate, Mumbai is divided into 24 administrative wards, ranging from Ward A to Ward T, which are further subdivided into 227 civic electoral wards. Bangalore: Initially divided into nine zones with 198 wards, Bangalore's administrative division was revised in 2023, leading to an increase in the number of wards to 225, under the administration of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). Delhi: The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), one of the largest municipal bodies globally, administers Delhi, encompassing 250 wards spread over an area of 1,397.3 square kilometres.

55. **Women's Reservation Bill**: Proposed legislation to reserve a percentage of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies.





03 National-level terms & positions

Cabinet Ministry

India's Cabinet Ministry, led by the Prime Minister, is a collective decision-making body composed of senior government officials, mainly ministers who head various ministries. Cabinet ministers are typically members of the Prime Minister's party or coalition and are responsible for specific government departments, developing policies and strategies in their respective areas. Their decisions, taken collectively as the Cabinet, guide the national agenda, shape legislative proposals, and oversee the implementation of laws and government policies across the country.



1. Key cabinet positions

A

Minister of Defence: Oversees the national defence and military policies, responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the country.

B

Minister of Home Affairs: Manages internal security, law and order, and also oversees immigration and disaster management.

C

Minister of Road Transport and Highways: Responsible for developing and maintaining national highways and road transport.

D

Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises: Focuses on promoting and facilitating the growth of small and medium-sized businesses.

E

Minister of Finance: Manages the country's financial policies, including budgeting, taxation and public expenditures.

F

Minister of Law and Justice: Oversees the legal and judicial system of the country.

G

Minister of Communications: Manages the country's communication infrastructure, including postal and telecommunications services.

H

Minister of Electronics and Information Technology: Responsible for IT policy and promoting digital initiatives.

I

Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment: Works towards the welfare and empowerment of disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society.

J

Minister of External Affairs: Manages foreign relations and represents India in international forums.

K

Minister of Education: Oversees the education system and policies from primary to higher education.

L

Minister of Tribal Affairs: Focuses on the socio-economic development of tribal communities.

M

Minister of Women and Child Development: Works towards women's empowerment and children's welfare.

N

Minister of Textiles: Manages and promotes the textile industry in the country.

O

Minister of Health and Family Welfare: Responsible for health policy, healthcare services and family welfare.

P

Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change: Manages environmental policies, conservation and climate change initiatives.

Q

Minister of Information and Broadcasting: Regulates the information, broadcasting and media sectors.

R

Minister of Railways: Manages the country's railway system, including its development and operations.

S

Minister of Minority Affairs: Focuses on policies and programs for the development of minority communities.

2. Election Commission of India: A constitutional body comprising of a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners, appointed by the President of India responsible for conducting and supervising elections in India.

3. Legislature: The legislature in India is the branch of government responsible for making laws. It is bicameral, consisting of the Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and the Lok Sabha (House of the People) at the national level and unicameral or bicameral assemblies at the state level. Members are either elected by the public or appointed, and they debate, propose and vote on new laws or amendments to existing laws.

4. Lok Sabha (House of the People): Composed of directly elected representatives from various constituencies across India, representing the Indian public.

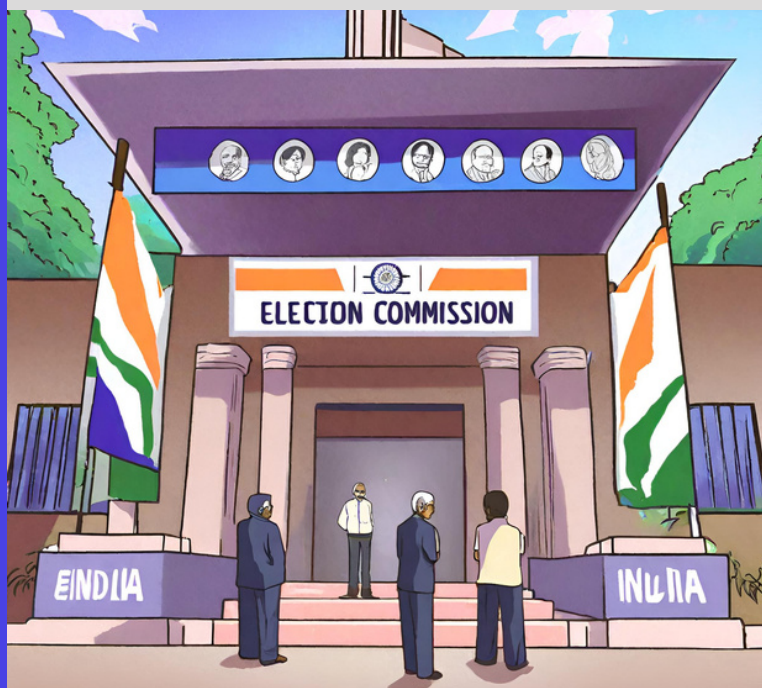
5. Member of Parliament (MP): An individual elected to represent a constituency in the Lok Sabha. An MP is involved in making national laws and policies.

6. Parliament: The supreme legislative body in India, consisting of two houses - Lok Sabha (House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (Council of States).

7. President: The President of India serves as the ceremonial head of state, overseeing constitutional matters and representing the country in international affairs.

8. Prime Minister: The head of the government in India, responsible for leading the executive branch and making policy decisions.

9. Rajya Sabha (Council of States): Comprises members elected by the state legislative assemblies and nominated members by the President of India, representing the states and union territories.



04 State-level terms & positions

1. Chief Minister (CM): The head of the government at the state level. The CM leads the state government overseeing state administration and policy implementation within the state.
2. District: A geographical area divided into constituencies to elect representatives to Parliament or a state legislature.
3. Governor: The Governor acts as the ceremonial head of a state, representing the central government and overseeing state governance in line with constitutional provisions.
4. Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA): An elected representative at the state level in India, responsible for representing a specific constituency in the state legislative assembly. Their work focuses on local issues and state governance.
5. State Assembly: The legislative body at the state level responsible for making laws specific to the state.

05 Local-level terms & positions



1. Councillors: Local government councillors are elected to represent areas responsible for representing the interest of the ward or area in the municipal or local council. Their duties include framing policies for local governance, overseeing the implementation of development projects and addressing the civic issues of their constituents.
2. Gram Panchayat: Gram Panchayat consists of a village or a group of villages divided into smaller units called "Wards". Each ward selects or elects a representative who is known as the Panch or ward member. The members of the Gram Sabha elect the ward members through a direct election.
3. Gram Sabha: The Gram Sabha is a body consisting of all the people registered in the electoral rolls who belong to a village within the area of the Panchayat at the village level.
4. Local Self Government: Governance and decision-making at the local level, often involving local elected bodies like municipal corporations and panchayats.
5. Panchayat: A local self-government institution in rural areas in India, responsible for local administration and development.
6. Sarpanch: The council leader is named Sarpanch. In other words, the Sarpanch is the President of the Panchayat. All the members of the Gram Sabha elect a Sarpanch. The Sarpanch is also traditionally known as Pradhan.



KUVIRAA

06 Fem in ism & gender

Fem in ism

Fem in ism is a socio-political movement and ideology that advocates for the rights and equality of women in all spheres of life. It seeks to challenge and dismantle gender-based discrimination and inequalities.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of all individuals, regardless of gender, ensuring that everyone's behaviour, aspirations, and needs are valued and favoured equally. Both concepts aim to create a society where gender does not limit an individual's potential or opportunities.



1. Cisgender (Cis): Individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.
2. Deadnaming: Referring to a transgender person by their birth name, which they no longer use.
3. Domestic Violence: Physical, emotional or economic abuse within a domestic setting.
4. Feminist: An individual who advocates for the social, political and economic equality of the sexes and equality of opportunity.
5. Gender Affirmation: The process of making social, legal or medical changes to align with one's gender identity.
6. Gender Dysphoria: Distress experienced by individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.
7. Gender Equity: Providing varying levels of support and opportunities to achieve fairness, recognizing different needs across genders.
8. Gender Equality: The belief in and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for people of all genders.

9. Gender Expression: The way individuals communicate their gender identity to others, often through clothing, behaviour and personal appearance.
10. Gender Fluid: Individuals whose gender identity may shift or change over time.
11. Genderqueer: Individuals who reject traditional gender distinctions and identify outside the binary.
12. Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class and gender creating overlapping systems of discrimination.
13. LGBTQIA+: An acronym representing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other identities.
14. Misgendering: Referring to someone using language that doesn't correctly reflect their gender identity such as incorrect pronouns.
15. Non-Binary: Individuals whose gender identity doesn't conform to traditional categories of male or female.
16. Reproductive Rights: The right to make decisions concerning reproduction, including access to healthcare, contraception and family planning.
17. Section 377: A section of the Indian Penal Code that criminalized consensual homosexual acts, decriminalized in 2018.
18. Sex Education: Education about human sexuality, including contraception, reproductive health and consent.
19. Sexual Harassment: Unwanted sexual advances or conduct that creates a hostile environment.
20. Transgender: Individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.

FEMINIST



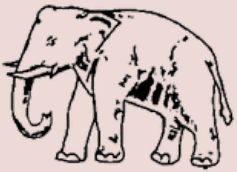
07 India's major political parties



Aam Aadmi Party (AAP): Formed in 2012, AAP emerged from the anti-corruption movement, promising a new era in Indian politics with a focus on transparency and governance reforms. It is currently led by Arvind Kejriwal. As of January 2024, AAP is predominantly active in Delhi and Punjab.



All India Trinamool Congress (AITC): Established in 1998, AITC's formation marked a significant shift in West Bengal's political landscape, challenging the longstanding communist rule. Led by Mamata Banerjee, AITC is known for its progressivism focused on the weaker sections, liberalism, secularism, and strong opposition to communist ideologies in West Bengal. As of early 2024, it is primarily based in West Bengal.



Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP): Founded in 1984, the BSP's creation was a major step towards representing and empowering the historically marginalised Dalits in Indian politics. Under the leadership of Mayawati, the BSP focuses on representing the Bahujans or the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. It has a significant presence in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP): Established in 1980, the BJP's formation signified the rise of opposition to the then-dominant INC. The BJP, headed by Jagat Prakash Nadda, is known for its right-wing stance, focusing on nationalistic values with a strong emphasis on cultural and historical aspects of India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi belongs to the BJP.



Communist Party of India (CPI): Founded in 1925, CPI's establishment marked the introduction of communist ideology in the Indian political spectrum. Under D. Raja's leadership, the CPI advocates for Marxist-Leninist principles and aims for a socialist India. The party has a significant presence in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]: Formed in 1964, CPI(M)'s emergence was pivotal in shaping leftist politics in India, especially in states like Kerala and West Bengal. Led by Sitaram Yechury, CPI(M) follows Marxist-Leninist theory, focusing on working-class issues. Significant in states like Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura.



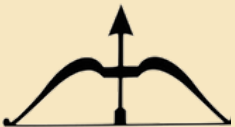
Indian National Congress (INC): Established in 1885, the INC has a legacy of leading India's struggle for independence and shaping its post-independence democratic framework. The INC, led by Mallikarjun Kharge, is one of India's oldest parties. Post Independence, it has significantly shaped India's political and socio-economic landscape, championing secularism and democratic values. It has a widespread influence across India.



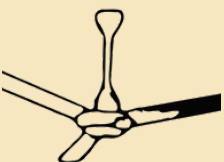
National People's Party (NPP): Formed in 2012, the NPP's establishment highlighted the importance of regional and tribal issues in Northeast India's politics. Headed by Conrad Sangma, the NPP is mainly prominent in Northeast India.



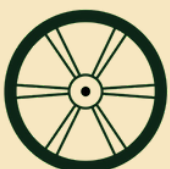
Nationalist Congress Party (NCP): Established in 1999, the NCP's formation signified a new direction in Maharashtra's political dynamics, focusing on national integrity and social justice. Sharad Pawar leads the NCP, focusing on its core values of nationalism, Gandhism, and socialism. It is prominent in Maharashtra.



Shiv Sena: Founded in 1966, Shiv Sena's emergence marked a significant moment in Maharashtra's political scene, emphasizing regional identity. It is a regional party in Maharashtra, known for its pro-Marathi ideology and strong stance on Hindu nationalism. It was founded by Bal Thackeray. The leadership has seen changes with Uddhav Thackeray and Eknath Shinde as prominent figures.



YSR Congress Party: Established in 2011, the party signifies a strong regional political identity in Andhra Pradesh. Led by Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, this party is primarily active in Andhra Pradesh and was formed on the ideals and legacy of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.



Janata Dal: Formed in 1988, it marked an important union of various regional political forces against the dominant Indian National Congress. This party has regional factions like Janata Dal (Secular) led by H.D. Deve Gowda and H.D. Kumaraswamy in Karnataka, and Janata Dal (United) led by Nitish Kumar in Bihar.



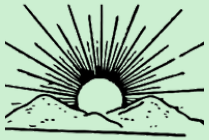
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha: Established in 1972, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha highlighted the tribal rights and autonomy movement in Jharkhand. It is a regional party in Jharkhand currently led by Shibu Soren and his son Hemant Soren.



Zoram People's Movement: A political party in Mizoram formed in 1997, advocating for state sovereignty and development. Led by Pu Zoramthanga.



Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party: Founded in 2017, it reflects Nagaland's evolving political landscape, focusing on regional and Naga identity. It is led by Neiphiu Rio.



Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK): Established in 1949, DMK's formation was crucial in shaping Tamil Nadu's political scene. It is a prominent party in Tamil Nadu, advocating Dravidian politics and social welfare. Currently led by M.K. Stalin.



Sikkim Krantikari Morcha: Founded in 2013, it represents a shift towards political change and development in Sikkim. It is a regional party in Sikkim, led by Prem Singh Tamang (P.S. Gelay).



Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS): Established in 2001, TRS played a central role in the formation of the state of Telangana, underlining regional aspirations. The party has a presence in Telangana, led by K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR).





Acknowledgements

This Lexicon was drafted by _____ and designed
by _____ with the support from _____.

About us

Kuviraa, which means courageous woman in multiple Indian languages, is a feminist organisation that envisions an India where adolescent girls and young women lead civic and political discourse, shaping brighter futures for themselves and their communities. We work with young girls, between the ages of 14 - 20 to increase leadership, knowledge and engagement in democratic processes.

If you are interested to learn more about our work at Kuviraa please reach out to us

